

Name: _____
Date: _____

THE PUNIC WARS

Rome fought three wars with Carthage between 264 and 146BCE. The wars established Rome as a world power and left the once powerful empire of Carthage in ruins.

Carthage was a city in North Africa originally founded as a trading post by the Phoenicians. Since historians have tended to label the conflicts by the Roman name, we know them as the Punic Wars. Punica was a Latin word for Phoenician.

By the time of the first Punic War, Carthage had created an empire that stretched across North Africa and into the southern coast of modern day Spain. Merchant sailors from Carthage traded with cities throughout the Mediterranean Sea. To protect its profitable sea trade Carthage developed a powerful navy.

The Romans completed their conquest of the Italian peninsula by 263BCE. Rome's economy depended on the plunder of their army. The Roman Senate had to keep the army busy, or the army might have turned against the Senate.

The first Punic War was fought over Sicily, a Mediterranean island off the coast of the Italian peninsula. Carthage controlled Sicily in 264BCE, so the Romans declared war to defend a small group of Roman fortune seekers Carthage had captured.

Rome had a powerful army, but they had little experience with the sea. The Romans developed an innovative technique to win several naval battles. They lacked the naval skill to sink ships, so the Romans outfitted their vessels with a hinged bridge. Roman sailors used pulleys to lower the bridge to face an enemy ship. The Roman ship would ram into an enemy vessel. An iron spike at the edge of the bridge attached the two ships, allowing soldiers to cross over and attack in hand-to-hand combat—where Rome was more experienced than Carthage.

To try to close the gap in naval power, the Romans captured a Carthaginian warship and used it as a model to build their fleet. They won a few early victories and captured most of Sicily, but the inexperience of the Roman navy left them unprepared for a catastrophic storm that destroyed two-thirds of their fleet and killed thousands of Roman sailors. Rome raised a second and third fleet, but storms also destroyed most of the additional ships.

A Carthaginian general named Hamilcar Barca recaptured most of Sicily, but Carthage did not have the money or manpower to continue to engage in the conflict. In 241BCE, Carthage surrendered Sicily to the Romans.

In 218BCE, a generation after the first Punic War,

Hannibal Barca—the son of Hamilcar—commanded an army from Spain. Hannibal led an army of 40,000 soldiers, 8,000 horses and 37 war elephants in a daring and difficult journey over the Alps. The Alps are a treacherous mountain range that stood between Spain and the Italian peninsula.

Hannibal expected some Italian cities to join his army, but the cities remained loyal to their conqueror. Hannibal's army won three decisive victories against Rome in northern Italy despite being outnumbered more than two to one. In the Battle of Canae, Hannibal's army surrounded the Romans, killing between 50,000 to 80,000 Roman soldiers—the most destructive battle in ancient history.

After their humiliation at Canae, Rome changed their strategy. The Romans sent a new army to northern Italy with instructions to withdraw. Hannibal spent the next twelve years destroying the Roman countryside, but his army had no opponent to fight. The antipathy, or bad feelings caused by Hannibal's destruction would last for generations and would lead to the third Punic War and the downfall of Carthage.

A Roman army led by Scipio attacked Carthage in 202BCE. Hannibal was ordered home to defend his native land. Without Hannibal in charge, the war on the Italian peninsula turned in Rome's favor. Once in Carthage, Hannibal had a mercenary army in place of his loyal soldiers. Mercenaries are foreign soldiers hired to fight. The mercenary army was no match for Scipio's trained forces. Rome defeated Hannibal's army and won the war.

Carthage was no longer in a position to hurt Rome after the second Punic War, but in 149BCE, Roman antipathy toward Carthage continued to linger. A Roman senator named Cato ended every speech with the cry, "Carthage must be destroyed." Rome attacked Carthage and the two sides fought bloody battles in a war that lasted almost three years. After a siege in 146BCE, the Romans broke through the city walls of Carthage. Once they subdued the Carthaginian army, Roman soldiers went from house to house slaughtering the people in their homes. After destroying Carthage, the Romans sold the remaining citizens into slavery, burned the city and destroyed Carthage's harbor.

Rome annexed Carthage by making the city a part of a Roman province they called Africa. Africa probably comes from a Latin word that means "sunny land without cold." The Punic Wars established Rome as a powerful nation and the wars were an indication that Rome would develop into one of the most powerful empires in history.

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Fill in the Blanks

Rome and C__rt__a__e fought three P__n__c Wars over _____ years beginning in _____ BCE. The wars established Rome as a world p__w__r and d__s__r__o__ed Carthage's once great North A__r__c__n empire. The first Punic War was fought over S__ci__y, an i__l__nd in the M__d__t__r__a__e__n Sea midway between the two cities. Carthage built a superior n_____ to support their m__r__h__a__t sailors. Rome had little experience f__g__t__ng at s____; they won many battles using i__n__v__t__ve techniques, but Rome also lost many ships due to their i__e__p__r__e__ce with s__o__ms. Carthage lost S__c__ly and the war when they ran out of the m_____ and m__n__o__er necessary to continue fighting.



This fresco by Jacopo Ripanda depicts Hannibal crossing the Alps

A generation later, a young Carthaginian g__n__r__l named H__n__i__al led his army in a difficult and daring journey over the Alpine *M__u__t__ins. Hannibal won three bloody b__t__l__s with the Roman army and spent most of the next t__e__ve years d__s__r__y__ng the I__a__i__n countryside. Hannibal was forced to leave his army and return home when a Roman general named S__i__io invaded Carthage. Hannibal was forced to fight with untrained m__r__e__a__y soldiers who were no match for Scipio's R__m__n army. Rome won the battle and the war.

Rome d__s__r__y__d their e__e__y in the t__i__d Punic War. After a three-year s__e__e, the Romans broke through the city w_____ of Carthage. The Carthaginians who were not k__l__ed were sold into s__a__e__y. Rome then d__s__r__y__d Carthage's h__r__or, ensuring that their old nemesis would never again be a *t__r__at.

Answer in Complete Sentences

1. Explain why the three conflicts between Rome and Carthage are remembered as the Punic Wars.

*2. Why do you think Hannibal led his army through the treacherous Alps instead of engaging his enemy at sea?

*3. Why does the author suggest that the Romans treated Carthage with such brutality after the third Punic War?

*This is a higher order learning question. You will earn credit for any reasonable answer.